

Committee sees proposals for new districts

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BATON ROUGE — State lawmakers Thursday got their first looks at proposals for redrawing new election districts for Congress, the Public Service Commission and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Rep. Rick Gallot, D-Ruston, chairman of the House and Governmental Affairs Committee, presented to the panel maps showing some shifting in PSC and BESE districts, but major changes in congressional districts to accommodate the state losing one of its seven districts. Population shifts in the United States and lack of growth in Louisiana forced the state to surrender a seat in the 435-member U.S. House of Representatives.

In all of the proposed districts, newly seated U.S. Rep. Jeff Landry, R-New Iberia, has to run against a more experienced incumbent if he wants to stay in Congress.

In two of three of Gallot proposals, Landry is pitted against U.S. Rep. Charles Boustany, R-Lafayette, in a district that roughly runs from Lafourche Parish to

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Calcasieu Parish. But in one of the drafts, he would run against U.S. Rep. Bill Cassidy, R-Baton Rouge.

Gallot offers what Shreveport demographer Elliott Stonecipher calls an "I-20 District" that runs across the top of the state from Caddo to East Carroll Parish. It does not force any North Louisiana incumbents to compete in the same district.

Gallot said that statistically, the two North Louisiana districts in his proposals have zero variance from the ideal population needed for a congressional district.

All three plans preserve a minority district based in New Orleans, but because that district lost so many voters, it is expanded into part of East Baton Rouge Parish to retain a strong black majority. It doesn't

ensure incumbent U.S. Rep. Cedric Richmond, D-New Orleans, re-election because he could pick up challengers in Baton Rouge.

Gallot insisted "these are just drafts" and he acknowledged that none of the congressmen participated in drawing the lines. He said the maps primarily were based "on what people told us they would like" when the committee toured the state seeking suggestions.

Sen. Bob Kostelka, R-Monroe, has been communicating with the state's congressional delegation and has a plan that he says "six congressmen have signed off on."

Landry, the seventh congressman, refused to agree to the plan, Kostelka said.

State Rep. Nancy Landry, R-Lafayette, said she doesn't believe that Gallot's third congressional plan, which doesn't have Lafayette and Lake Charles in the same district and sepa-

rates Lake Charles from its port in Cameron Parish will survive. "It doesn't make sense. That's not what the people in the congressional district requested."

Gallot admitted he was "not particularly happy" with that draft and that he, hasn't decided whether to offer it as legislation. "This is just a starting point," he said, and if the people in the current 7th District don't like it, he might drop that version.

Rep. Joe Harrison, R-Labadieville, offered an alternative plan that would preserve the minority district in New Orleans but shift most districts vertically. Jeff Landry would run from the coast up through Rapides and Avoyelles, Boustany's district would run across the bottom of the state from Lafayette to Cameron and turn north to DeSoto and Winn. Cassidy's district would run from Baton Rouge up the eastern border to Madison

and Franklin parishes.

U.S. Reps. John Fleming and Rodney Alexander would clash in a district that would run across the northern part of the state.

Committee members asked no questions about Harrison's plan.

Nancy Landry said she also has problems with Gallot's proposal for drawing new BESE districts.

"Lafayette is carved into three districts," she said. "It would make it difficult for a Lafayette candidate to get elected when the district had only one-third of the parish."